



Peregrine falcon

Falco peregrinus anatum

STATUS

Recovered (64 FR 46542, August 25, 1999)

DESCRIPTION

Peregrine falcons have a characteristic dark marking below their eyes that extends down over their cheeks. These crow-sized birds nest high on cliffs, often near lakes, rivers or marshes. Male peregrines begin to attract females through spectacular aerial flights in early spring. By May, females have laid two to four eggs on cliff ledges, and they begin to share incubation with their male partners. Young peregrine falcons can be seen in August, learning to swoop and catch prey in mid-air. Birds comprise over 90% of the prey base for peregrines, but their diet also includes some bats and insects.

HISTORY

Peregrines were found throughout most of North America, but by the mid-1970s, they were almost extinct. The pesticide DDT was banned from use in 1972, removing a significant threat to peregrines and enabling recovery to begin.

DISTRIBUTION

Today, population numbers continue to increase from Canada to Mexico, due to the DDT ban, captive breeding, and reintroduction of the birds to the wild for over 20 years. By 1996, Idaho's recovery target of 17 nesting pairs was achieved. At the end of 1997, 1,184 known pairs of peregrine falcons graced the coterminous United States, exceeding the goal of 728 for delisting. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service delisted the peregrine falcon on August 25, 1999. Monitoring will continue for 13 years after the delisting, with reviews every three years to ensure that populations remain stable or increase.

WHAT THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

Ingestion of environmental contaminants, usually in the form of agricultural pesticides (such as DDT), weakened eggshells and caused reproductive failures and direct bird mortality.

WHAT WAS DONE TO RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

Peregrine population numbers began to increase after the use of DDT was banned in the United States in 1972. The Peregrine Fund, Inc., located in Boise, Idaho, has been responsible for the breeding and release of over 4,000 captive-produced peregrine falcons. Other methods to help reestablish these birds include breeding pair surveys, monitoring nest productivity, protecting habitat and conducting research on populations and their prey base. The delisting of the peregrine endorses the success of methods used to recover the species.

REFERENCES

USFWS. 1984, American peregrine falcon, Rocky Mountain/ southwest population Recovery Plan.

The Peregrine Fund. 1998. Annual Operations Report. World Center for Birds of Prey. Boise, Idaho.

